



# Department of Justice

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**HOUSTON COUNTY MAN SENTENCED TO 200 MONTHS  
IN FEDERAL PRISON FOR CHILD PORNOGRAPHY OFFENSE**

**MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA**— Dothan resident, Phillip Rister, 62, was sentenced to serve 200 months in prison for receiving and distributing child pornography over the internet, Leura G. Canary, United States Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama, announced. Mr. Rister had previously pled guilty to the charge – a violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 2252A(a)(2) – in August of 2008. The sentence of just over sixteen and a half years was handed down by the Honorable W. Keith Watkins, III, United States District Judge for the Middle District of Alabama, after extensive briefing and argument from both sides about what would constitute an appropriate prison term.

The federal case against Mr. Rister began on August 1, 2007, when undercover investigators with the Bay County, Florida Sheriff's Office discovered child pornography being shared over the Gnutella file-sharing network by an internet user in Dothan, Alabama. Investigators with the Houston County Sheriff's Office were able to determine that the user was Mr. Rister and subsequently obtained and executed a search warrant for his home, where they seized a personal computer and various other electronic media. A forensic examination of the evidence resulted in the discovery of more than 600 images and videos depicting children engaging in sexually explicit conduct. Some of the children in the images appear younger than five years old.

In pronouncing the sentence – a three-year downward variance from the advisory range established by the United States Sentencing Commission – Judge Watkins explained that the defendant's age, health, and prior military service had to be balanced against the need for the sentence to reflect the seriousness of the offense, to promote respect for the law, and to effect justice for the victims. As a part of his sentence, after serving out his term of imprisonment, Mr. Rister will spend the rest of his life on supervised release.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood. In May 2006, the U.S. Department of Justice launched Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by United States Attorneys' Offices, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit [www.projectsafechildhood.gov/](http://www.projectsafechildhood.gov/).

The investigation of this case was conducted by the Houston County Sheriff's Office and the Bay County, Florida, Sheriff's Office, acting in concert with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Alabama District Attorney's Association – Office of Prosecution Services. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Nathan D. Stump.